

Congressman Baird's State of the Union Response (January 31, 2006)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird (D-Vancouver) tonight released the following statement in response to the President's State of the Union address:

There were elements of the President's speech that I agree with. The trouble is much of his rhetoric does not square with the reality of his actions.

I agree that we can and must do more to ensure America remains a competitive and viable force in the global economy. That is why I have helped small businesses innovators overcome regulatory burdens, and led the effort to strengthen the Buy America law in order to keep good jobs right here at home.

I was also pleased to hear the President discuss the need to strengthen our math, science, and foreign language education. His plans are consistent with legislation I introduced in November (H.R. 4196) to help close our nation's language gap and in turn, improve our economic competitiveness and national security. I do find it ironic, however, that while the President calls for an increase in science education, his Administration has consistently censored scientists, increased the cost of student loans, and undermined scientific integrity.

I also agree that we must honor the sacrifices of our soldiers and their families. Unfortunately, last year we had to fight in Congress, against both the Administration and the Republican Majority, to obtain adequate funding for our veterans. It appears additional cuts to veterans' services may be coming from the Administration yet again. That is a shame. Having visited our wounded at Walter Reed again just last week, I believe we must do more to support our soldiers in the field and when they return home. Frankly, when I look at cuts to veterans services, I do not believe the Administration has been meeting that commitment.

The President also stressed the importance of health care, but I do not understand how he can state, as he did tonight, that we are meeting the responsibility to help the poor and needy access health care. With 45 million of our fellow citizens lacking health insurance, with families and businesses struggling to meet rising health costs, and with millions unable to obtain medications in the chaos of the new Medicare changes, we are not meeting that responsibility as well as a great nation should.

The President rightly asserted, America is addicted to oil. In a time of record-breaking oil prices, conflict in the Middle East, and global warming, our nation desperately needs a new approach to its outdated energy policies. Incentives that promote renewable energy, energy conservation, and energy efficiency - all of which I have consistently supported - are what will help loosen our addictive grip on fossil fuels. I regret, however, that the energy bill President Bush and Vice-President Cheney championed and Congress passed last year, does so little to promote a forward-thinking energy policy and instead rewards big oil companies that continue to reap record profits.

Tonight, we once again heard the President call for making his fiscally irresponsible tax policies permanent. And next

week, the President will submit a budget to Congress that disguises the cost of the bloated budget deficit by borrowing money from the Social Security trust fund and failing to take into account the ever-escalating cost of the war in Iraq. This is deceptive, it is unnecessary, and it should stop.

The President again claimed that he will be able to cut the deficit in half by 2009. This year's estimated deficit, combined with the actual deficits from 2003, 2004, and 2005 make up the four largest deficits in American history. To accommodate these deficits, the debt ceiling has been raised three times under this Administration's watch, and a fourth increase is expected next month.

The President is not leveling with the American people. His economic policies have left average middle-class Americans families struggling to make ends meet and added trillions of dollars to our debt. Our children and grandchildren, who will be left to foot the bill of our fiscal negligence, deserve better.

The President spoke to the need to restore civility in Congress to that I say Amen. But, words alone will not achieve civility. The Executive Branch must honor the rights and responsibilities of Congress and the Constitution. I have long championed efforts to give Members of Congress time to read legislation before voting. Yet, that simple and common sense proposal has been repeatedly rejected and the principle violated by the Republican Majority, who bring legislation to the floor in the dead of the night giving Members mere hours to pore through hundreds of pages of major policy and spending decisions. As we start the second half of the 109th Congress, I hope the Republican Majority and the President will sincerely reform how they do business, respect the rights of all Americans, stop the corrupt pandering to lobbyists, and enact true reforms.

Unfortunately, the State of the Union has turned into a poll-tested pep rally designed to boost ratings, instead of a forum for offering real solutions to our nation's problems. To truly understand the state of our nation, we should listen first and foremost to the folks back home. People in Southwest Washington, not the other Washington, tell me time and again that they are concerned most about losing their pensions, finding a way out of Iraq, keeping good jobs here in America, accessing truly affordable health care, and keeping their neighborhoods safe from drugs and crime.

It takes more than words to bring people together, it takes sincere action. Let us hope that in the White House and in the People's House, real action and real reforms will follow the President's words tonight.

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